

Rules of the Game

Making Magic Items (Part Seven)

By Skip Williams



Okay, you've finally written out a description for your item. Now it's time to figure out what the item costs. This week, we'll consider that problem and conclude this particular subject!

Base Price and Market Price

The rules offer you some help in this endeavor, but ultimately your own good judgment will prove the best guide.

Assigning a market price to a magic item is covered in detail in Chapter 7 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. See Table 7-33. Items that provide simple **bonuses** to **attacks**, **Armor Class**, **saving throws**, or **checks** are fairly easy to evaluate.

If your item doesn't provide any bonuses and has no clear spell analogy, try comparing it against similar items. If that's not helpful, consider the question of when you think it would be appropriate for a PC to have one of your items. Should he have it at 7th level? According to Table 5-1: Character Wealth by Level in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, a 7th-level PC is assumed to have 19,000 gp of gear. A reasonable cost for a single item that such a character might own would be somewhere between 10% and 40% of the character's total wealth. In this case, that's 1,900 gp to 7,600 gp.

Weapons, Armor, and Shields: Many weapon or armor qualities are not assigned a market price in cash, but they are instead priced as "+1 bonus", "+2 bonus," and so on. This was discussed in Part Four.

You can use this system when the property directly affects the offense (**hit** chance or **damage** dealt) of a weapon, or the defense (likelihood of a hit or damage received) of an armor. Otherwise, your new weapon property should be priced as a no-slot item. For example, *armor of Strength +4* shouldn't be priced as a +2 or +3 armor bonus; instead it should be priced as a +4 ability enhancement (+16,000 gp), doubled to +32,000 gp because it doesn't use up any item slots (see Table 7-33).

Some Things to Avoid

Keep in mind that the rules and advice in Chapter 7 of the *Dungeon Master's Guide* are intended to help a reasonable person estimate what an item is worth in play. It's always a mistake to try to create the most powerful item possible for the lowest possible price or vice versa.

When the Formulas Fail: Table 7-33 provides the basic tool for determining item prices and costs, but many items don't fit the table. Many spells in the game work fine as spells, but spells come with built-in limits on their power, and chief among those is the simple fact that a spell is used up when cast and a character has only so many spells available each day. Many spells become world beaters when they're placed in items that work continuously or in items that can be reused over and over again. For example, a *ring of invisibility* is a command-

activated item that duplicates a 2nd-level spell, and its caster level is 3rd (the minimum to cast the spell). According to Table 7-33, such an item has a cost of $2 \times 3 \times 1,800$ gp (spell level \times caster \times 1,800 gp). So, a *ring of invisibility* costs 10,800 gp, right? Wrong, it costs nearly twice that much (20,000 gp) because an endless supply of *invisibility* spells are worth something extra.

Use the Correct Formula: One item people frequently ask me about is a *ring of true strike*. The spell provides a whopping +20 **insight bonus** on **attack rolls** and negates **miss chances** arising from concealed targets. It's only 1st level, however, because it is a personal range spell with a duration of 1 round. That means you can normally manage one attack every 2 rounds when using the spell. Also, you can't bestow it on an ally (except for a familiar or animal companion) because of its personal range.

Assuming such a ring worked whenever it was needed and has a caster level of 1st, it would cost a mere 2,000 gp by the formula for a use-activated spell effect (in this case, $1 \times 1 \times 2,000$ gp). Sharp-eyed readers will note that any continuously functioning item has a cost adjustment of $\times 4$ (see the footnotes to Table 7-33), which bumps up the ring's cost to 8,000 gp. That's a real bargain for an item that provides so much boost to a user's combat power. Much too great a bargain.

So, what would our example *ring of true strike* be worth? Insight bonuses aren't included on Table 7-33, but a weapon bonus has a cost equal to the bonus squared \times 2,000 gp, so a +20 weapon would cost 800,000 gp. One can argue that the ring isn't quite as good as a +20 weapon because it doesn't provide a damage bonus. That, however, ignores the very potent ability to negate most miss chances. Also, the ring's insight bonus works with any sort of attack the wearer makes. On top of all that, the insight bonus stacks with any enhancement bonus from a magic weapon the wearer might wield. Still, 800,000 gp is a lot of cash and the lack of a damage bonus is significant, so some price reduction is in order. A 50% reduction might be in order, or 400,000 gp for the ring.

Would you pay 400,000 gp for a *ring of true striking*? I would if I could afford it. At a price of 400,000 gp, our mythical *ring of true strike* is something only an epic-level character could afford. That's fine, because epic play is where the ring belongs.

Items With Multiple Powers

The sidebar on page 282 in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* causes a great deal of trouble. Here are a few tips to make the advice in the sidebar work for you.

Multiple Similar Abilities Versus Multiple Different Abilities: An item with multiple similar abilities costs much less than an item with multiple different abilities, so what's the difference? In this case, "similar" abilities are functions that draw from the same pool of charges, or that can't be used at the same time (or at least don't provide a great deal of extra benefit if they are used together), or all of the above. Sometimes, an item has powers that receive this similar abilities price reduction when the item's multiple powers work together to produce an overall effect, or when an item's powers must be activated separately, but that's fairly rare.

A staff is a great example of an item whose multiple powers are priced as "similar" abilities. Refer to Part Three for notes on pricing staves. Remember, however, that all a staff's powers must have the same caster level; for an item that has a different caster level for different powers, be sure to charge full price for the most expensive power, 75% for the next most expensive power, and 50% for all other powers.

An item has multiple different abilities when they do not draw from the same pool of charges or otherwise don't interfere with each other. Usually, such powers must be activated separately. Most rods are good examples of

this kind of item.

Slotless Powers: According to Table 7-33, an item that doesn't take up space on the user's body has double the normal price. In many cases, it's appropriate to levy this extra cost when an item has multiple powers, especially when one power works continuously or the item's multiple powers tend to reinforce each other in play. The weapon that also bestows a Strength boost from an earlier example is a good example of this kind of item.

Item Pricing Examples

The best way to learn item pricing is to practice, so here are some examples taken from this very site:

Bracers of Brachiation: The slim *bracers of brachiation* grant the wearer a climb speed of 20 feet in forested areas. The user gains a +8 racial bonus on all **Climb** checks, and it can always choose to **take 10**, even if rushed or threatened while climbing. In addition, while using its climb speed to move in forested areas, the creature gains a +2 insight bonus on **initiative checks** and **Reflex saving throws**.

Moderate transmutation; CL 7th; Craft Wondrous Item, *spider climb*, creator must have at least 10 ranks in Climb; Price 18,400 gp; Weight 1 lb.

The items were priced as follows:

+8 skill bonus = 6,400 (bonus squared x 100 gp). The skill bonus is limited to forested areas, and that would argue for a reduction, but the bracers also grant a climb speed of 20 feet in forested areas, so we'll leave this price alone.

+2 insight bonus on Reflex saves = 4,000 gp. A save bonus other than a resistance bonus is worth the bonus squared x 2,000 gp, or 8,000 gp according to Table 7-33. This one, however, is limited to Reflex saves made in forested areas, so we'll reduce that by half to 4,000 gp.

The +2 initiative bonus in woods is worth at least as much as the save bonus, 4,000 gp.

This is a multifunction item, so the cheaper functions have a price multiplier of x 1.5.

That makes the market price (and base price) 6,400 gp + 6,000 (4,000 x 1.5) + 6,000 (4,000 x 1.5) = 18,400. The monetary cost to create is 9,200 gp (half the base price); the XP cost to create is 736 XP (1/25th the base cost).

Figurine of Wondrous Power (Limestone Crab): A *limestone crab* appears as a miniature statuette, often badly eroded, of a crab. When the *figurine* is tossed down and the correct command word is spoken, it becomes a living monstrous crab. The monstrous crab obeys and serves its owner; it understands Common but does not speak. The monstrous crab can serve as a beast of burden, a mount, or a combatant as its owner desires. Unlike a normal monstrous crab, the *limestone crab* retains some of the qualities of stone when animated and has **hardness** 3. A *limestone crab* can be used twice per week for up to 6 hours per use.

If a *limestone crab* is broken or destroyed in its statuette form, it is forever ruined. All magic is lost -- its power departed. If slain in animal form, the figurine simply reverts to a statuette that can be used again at a later time.

A *limestone crab* always feels damp to the touch, as if it had just been plucked from a tide pool.

Moderate transmutation; CL 11th; Craft Wondrous Item, *animate objects*, *stoneskin*; Price 10,000 gp.

No spell is analogous to what this item does (though the *animate objects* spell comes close). However, plenty of other figurines of wondrous power are in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. A *limestone crab* is about as tough as a griffon (see the [Far Corners of the World feature](#) for monstrous crab stats), so pricing equals the bronze griffon figurine of 10,000 gp.

A Completely Unofficial Rule: Cooperative Item Creation

As noted back in Part One, more than one character can cooperate in the creation of an item, with each participant providing one or more of the prerequisites. According to the rules, however, XP costs cannot be shared. One character must shoulder the XP burden alone.

If players in your game are avid magic item creators, you might want to experiment with shared XP costs. You can allow characters who work together on a magic item to divide up the XP cost any way they like. To share the cost, a character must provide at least one of the item's prerequisites. Any division of the XP cost is possible, provided that all the creators agree to the scheme.

If you have the kind of campaign in which some of your players pester the others to make magic items for them, you might want to allow any character to share the XP cost to make an item. An XP donor must be present each day during the item's creation (or at least when work begins on the item each day). Allow the XP donation to be strictly voluntary -- it doesn't work if the donor is magically charmed or compelled, or if the donor is bullied or intimidated into contributing. On the other hand, allowing evil spellcasters to force XP from unwilling victims might just add the right touch of nastiness to dark fantasy campaigns.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon Magazine* for 18 years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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